

## **Guidelines for Reflective Writing**

As you prepare your reflective writings, consider the following steps and questions. Reflection is not a linear process, but learning how to write reflectively sometimes requires us to consciously process the events, people, and impressions around us in order to analyze and reflect on them for future action. Remember that reflection moves beyond description into analysis and purposeful or intentional action.

**Step One: What? (Description)** When you profile a learner or a context, the first step is to describe what you know --- what you can see and hear, what a person tells you, what learning data and student writing samples suggest to you, and such. Ask yourself questions such as the following if you are trying to describe a person, event, or learning context:

- \* What is the physical description? What behaviors are observed? What is heard?
- \* What is going on? When did it occur? Who was involved?
- \* Where am I? What is the perspective from which I am observing? How does my perspective impact what I see, hear and know?
- \* What did I do? What did others do?
- \* What, if anything, is unusual about what has been observed?

**Step Two: Why? (Analysis and Interpretation)** While you are describing a scene, you are likely to consider why things happened the way they did. You are moving into analysis. This process is critical to reflective practice. Some of the following questions might be helpful as you analyze events.

- \* Why do I think things happened in this way?
- \* Why did I choose to act the way I did? What can I surmise about why the other person(s) acted as she/he/they did? What was going on for each of us?
- \* What was I thinking and feeling? How might this have affected my choice of behavior?
- \* How might the context have influenced the experience? Was there something about the activities or something about the timing or location of events?
- \* Are there other potential contributing factors? Something about what was said or done by others that triggered my response? Are there past experiences --- mine, students', the schools' ---that may have contributed to the response?
- \* What are my hunches about why things happened in the way they did?

**Step Three: So What? (Meaning and Application)** Being able to describe something and figure out why it happened isn't enough to improve one's teaching. A reflective practitioner needs to see the overall meaning of events in order to use them to improve teaching practice. Consider the following questions:

- \* Why did this seem like a significant event to reflect on?
- \* What have I learned from this? How could I improve?
- \* How might this change my future thinking, behaving, interactions?
- \* What questions remain?

**Step Four: Now What? (Implications for Action)** It is in this stage that reflection moves into action planning. What are the implications of what you have discovered from the preceding steps? Note: the most powerful reflection focuses on student learning – how you will shift your practice to improve learning for your students. Keep in mind that when you reflect on student learning, you want to consider the needs of your current learners and plan what you will do next to support their learning AND you want to consider what you will do differently for future learners.

\* What will I do differently?

\* Are there other people I should actively include in reflecting on this event? If so, who and what would we interact about?

\* Next time a situation like this presents itself, what do I want to remember to think about? How do I want to behave?

\* How could I set up conditions to increase the likelihood of productive interactions and learning for this set of learners AND for future learners?

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FYI: More information about reflective practice.....

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- The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards incorporates three kinds of writing into its portfolios: descriptive (What?), analytical (Why?), and reflective (How? and What next?).
- Some researchers suggest that teachers move through a series of concerns that impact the focus of their reflections. We begin our careers with a focus on self (How am I doing? Do students like me? What did the principal think of my lesson?). We move toward a focus on whole class instruction and issues of management (How am I organizing instruction and addressing curriculum? Are students learning? Are they meeting the standards? How can I select more meaningful reading materials and resources? How can I handle the paper load?). Eventually we move toward a focus on the impact of one's actions and the needs of individual learners within a group (How can I meet the needs of my visual learners? How do I help the English as a new language learners? How can I engage Johnny in the lesson? What would happen if I communicated with his parents more often?).
- Lasley and others talk about three stages of reflection when they examine the depth of reflective writing. Stage one focuses on technical issues – examining methods or techniques. In stage two, a teacher has a conceptual focus (Are my classroom practices consistent with my philosophy of teaching?) or a focus on practical issues (Does my current practice appear to foster or diminish student engagement?). The third stage focuses on examining not only goals and methods but also outcomes from a moral, ethical, and social perspective (Is my philosophy consistent with the needs of my students? Do my practices truly enhance my students' growth? What can I do to facilitate any restructuring that needs to occur in my classroom and the school in order to enhance learning?).